

LEGISLATIVE AND PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

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Ways public policy is created and influenced:

- Legislation
- Budget
- Regulations (often next step when law is passed)
- Membership on a public commission or providing information to the commission
- Meetings with legislative policy staff
- Meetings with the Governor and other general officers and their staff persons
- On-going communications with House and Senate delegations about issues of concern to you and your agencies

Most effective ways to communicate with legislators:

- Personal visits and phone calls
- Personal handwritten letters
- E-mail
- Form letters or postcards – quantity important
- Petitions – can show extent of local support

Qualities and strategies of good advocates:

- Anticipating and planning for what needs to be done – testimony, who will testify, getting others out to hearings and events, etc.
- Knowing the issue well and providing good, concise information – data, real-life stories, fact sheets, reports, etc. Relating information and data to the legislator's district, if possible. Being up-front about any fiscal impacts of your proposal.
- Having some agreed-to options for compromise, but also understanding your bottom-line.
- Always getting back to legislators or policy-makers with answers to their questions, concerns, etc.
- Keeping in close touch with bill's sponsor (but don't be a pest).
- Being persistent – keeping on top of your bill and expect set-backs; "window of opportunity" for an issue.
- Being patient – process can be very drawn-out and tedious.
- Not lying or being misleading – be honest about the opposition and counter their arguments upfront. Developing trust and credibility is absolutely essential.

- Developing good working relationships with other lobbyists – they are a good source of information and can put in a “good word” for your issue.
- Being polite, keeping your sense of humor, being tolerant of the quirks of the environment and the process.
- Planning to be there for the long-term and taking the long-view – change in the public policy environment most often is incremental.

Building good relationships with legislators:

- Representatives and Senators are elected **LOCALLY**, and that is where their priority interests lie.
- Determine which legislators may already be familiar with your issues, your agency and can be counted on to represent your interests. But don’t take their support for granted – continue to educate and cultivate.
- If any of your legislators are in the House and Senate leadership and/or committee chairs, be sure they are well-informed about your issue.
- Identify any opportunities to create a champion for your issue within your delegation or identify who already plays that role in the General Assembly and keep in touch with that legislator. You can become the “expert” on the issue to whom they turn for information and advice.
- Be aware of new legislators or new roles for current legislators and follow-up.
- Determine if any local legislators are on the committee to which the bill was assigned and give them a “heads-up” when a bill of interest to you is scheduled for a hearing.
- Determine if any local legislators are on a commission addressing an issue you are interested in.
- When approaching a legislator, identify yourself and whether you are from his/her district. Give them any handout after when you have finished your conversation.
- Don’t forget the Governor’s Office, both for legislation and the budget, which after all is a policy document. Identify anyone locally who has ties with the Governor and be sure they are informed about and understand your issue.
- Learn about a legislator’s background, employment, special interests, whom she/he may be friendly with. Learn how to pronounce her/his name correctly.
- Find out where and how a legislator wants to be contacted – at home, at the office, by e-mail, snail mail, etc.
- Survey your Board members for any close relationships with any legislators; bring that person along to any meetings with legislators and/or ask that Board member to communicate and reinforce your position; also engage staff, donors and clients, as appropriate.
- Remember to thank personally and publicly any legislator who has helped your cause.